

Hoosier Folklore

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FOLKLORE FROM "EGYPT"

By GRACE PARTRIDGE SMITH

What follows is a presentation of folklore findings in Southern Illinois, continued from an article on a similar topic in an issue of the *Journal of American Folklore*.¹ From that date, further search in the area known as "Egypt"² has resulted in an accumulation of traditional beliefs, sayings, narratives, and the like. Considered together with material offered in the first series, that recorded here may probably serve to indicate the type of folksay most widespread in Egypt; at any rate, it represents that most easily turned up.

Many historical anecdotes flourish in this area, especially those about Lincoln³ and General Logan.⁴ The Egyptian knows by heart stories of gangsters and vendettas in "bloody" Williamson County⁵; of "Big Harpe" and "Little Harpe," of Cave-in-Rock fame⁶; of the Ohio River bandit, "Colonel Plug" and his wife, "Pluggy."⁷ All these tales are, of course, of interest, but primarily history and not exactly what the collector is anticipating when prospecting for what we term folklore. However, some of these very stories and others attached to pioneer folk and places are already tinged with

¹*Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 54 (1941), pp. 48-59.

² A popular epithet for Southern Illinois, in use as early as 1828. The reader is referred to the former article mentioned for a common explanation of this place name.

³ Egypt feels a real claim to Lincoln. Cf. George Washington Smith, *When Lincoln Came to Egypt* (Herrin, Ill., 1940).

⁴ Gen. Logan was a native of Murphysboro. It is said he instituted Memorial Day, conducting the first services in 1866, two years previous to his "Order No. Eleven" as Commander of the G. A. R., proclaiming May 30 as the date this festival was to be observed.

⁵ Williamson County histories, period newspapers, and so on.

⁶ Otto A. Rothert, *The Outlaws of Cave-In-Rock* (Cleveland, 1924).

⁷ Mildred Hartsough, *From Canoe to Steel Barge on the Upper Mississippi* (Minneapolis, 1934).

romance and definitely slated for tomorrow's folklore if parts of them have not already become such.⁸

In spite of a scant preoccupation on the part of Egyptians with the folklore of their region, an attitude really not peculiar to the locality, the writer has been able to gather together a sampling of Southern Illinois folk narratives, superstitions, and the like, some of them current, but the majority stemming from other days and from lands other than our own, or, at least, modeled by the Egyptians on ingrained traditional patterns.

As in the former article, the material submitted is grouped under various folklore categories. Each group is introduced by remarks on the type with particular reference to Egypt. Stories in the groups are prefaced by suggestions on variants and, now and then, indication of motifs according to Thompson's *Motif-Index*⁹ with this exception, namely, that if a motif appearing in the following stories has already been noted in the former series referred to, motif letter and number will not be duplicated here.

Titles to the stories have been given by the writer.¹⁰ Names of informants and their place of residence are indicated except in one or two cases. In the groups "Signs and Superstitions" (IX) and "Folk Medicine" (X), the writer is indebted to numerous persons throughout Egypt but especially to a former editor¹¹ of the *Vienna Community High School Science Bulletin* for permission to reprint a score or more of superstitions gathered by Vienna boys and girls from oldsters in their vicinity. These items will be dispersed among Groups IX and X without further acknowledgement. The groups follow:

I. WITCH TALES

Witches moved into Southern Illinois with the early set-

⁸ The way of popular imagination and the result of re-telling through the years.

⁹ Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (Helsinki, 1932-1935).

¹⁰ Starred titles are reprinted by permission from the writer's article "Your Egyptian Folklore" in the *Egyptian Key* (January, 1945); those with double star from the writer's radio broadcast, "Collector's Luck in Egypt," June 13, over Station WJPF, Herrin, Ill., in a weekly program for the Southern Illinois Normal University at Carbondale.

¹¹ Mrs. Nadine Dungan, of Grantsburg.

tlers to carry on—so to speak—a continuous tradition.¹² The belief in witches and their black magic extended during the centuries from the hotbeds of European witchdom even to the prairies, groves, and hills of Egypt. For testimony of witchcraft practices in Egyptian communities, in the early days and onward up to the mid-eighteen hundreds, we have the word not only of old grannies, but that of county and state histories,¹³ which record—frequently citing names of suspected persons and places of their activities—examples of untoward events attributed mostly to old crones, occasionally to men.

So-called “witch-masters” were about the only ones who were able to combat such disastrous happenings as transformation of man to horse, spells on cattle and guns, thefts of milk by witch-hare (cat, pig), or other witch necromancies. Countercharms recommended by these doctors included image-magic, the silver bullet, and witch-balls of hair, moved over the head of the patient to exorcise evil spirits.

At the present day, such ideas and practices have fairly generally died out except in out-of-the-way sections where one occasionally hears of a persecuted old soul whom everyone believes a witch. When inquiring around Egypt’s towns, the writer received such information as this, “Yes, there was an old witch around here about forty years ago. She lived in an old hovel out by the strip-mine,” or, “out in the sticks.” It is difficult to get at the bottom of such prattle.

Some of the motifs characteristic of witch tales in Egypt were included in earlier examples of the type: the power of witches to transform themselves to shapes desired; the habit of molesting cattle in the form of hare or pig; the cat-witch; image magic; the silver bullet; disenchantment and countercharm (spittle); wounds *in propria persona*; the witch-ball; magic bridle; riding a person (to death); counting; witch powerless to cross running water, and so on. A few of these motifs reappear below.

¹² George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), pp. 219, 527, n. 45.

¹³ Milo Erwin, *History of Williamson County, Illinois* (Marion, Ill., 1876), pp. 61-62; William Henry Perrin, *History of Alexander, Union, and Pulaski Counties, Illinois* (Chicago, 1883), pp. 281 ff.; Alexander Davidson and Bernard Stuvé, *A Complete History of Illinois from 1673-1873* (Springfield, Ill., 1874), pp. 230-231.

1. *A Near Parricide*

This story was told by a little old lady of Pinckneyville, now deceased, as she and the writer were sitting on the rickety front porch of her cabin. A more skilled story-teller would have padded the same plot with numerous details. Here the motifs are strung together in skeleton-like form.

A son married against his father's wishes. The father then tormented his son in every way possible, especially in bewitching his cattle. When the son couldn't stand it any longer, he sent for a witch-doctor. The doctor told the son to draw a picture of his father and shoot it with a silver bullet. The consequence was that after the son did this, his father's teeth were knocked out.

(Related motifs are: D 1385.4 *Silver bullet protects against witches* and D 2061.2.2 *Murder by sympathetic magic. An object or an animal is abused or destroyed to bring about the death of a person.* See also D 712.7 *Disenchantment by shooting.*)

2. *The Witch Doctor*

Informant: Miss Tina Goodwin, Carbondale.

An old lady, Grandma Anderson, told a story about a woman who was very sick. Someone in the invalid's family went to a witch doctor in the neighborhood to see if she couldn't give them a remedy for the sick woman. So the witch doctor gave them an object that looked like a curry-comb and told them to put it on the sick woman's chest, teeth down. It pressed fearfully on the woman's skin but she endured it for several days. She woke up one night and couldn't stand it any longer. She was in such pain, she decided to turn the object over so the flat side would be on the chest and the teeth side up. This made her much easier. Later they found out that the witch doctor was very sick with her chest inflamed and bleeding.

(In this case, the doctor was not a witch-master, but the witch herself. The afflicted of the countryside, thinking that these doctors could cure their ills, frequently resorted to them, sometimes to their sorrow. Their reputed "white magic" was often cast aside for a blacker one. Motif D 2063.1.1. *Tormenting by sympathetic magic.*)

II. GHOST AND CEMETERY STORIES

It is not difficult in Egypt to ferret out stories of this sort, for belief in "ghostes" and "hants" has not wholly disappeared from this section. Every now and then, a haunted house is pointed out, carefully shunned by the superstitious who tell of flickering lights and phantom shapes seen at night in

abandoned houses. Similar frighten-tales are relayed from mouth to mouth of the Old Slave House, near the town of Harrisburg, of buildings in Cave-in-Rock, and of Cairo's Hallday Hotel¹⁴ dungeons. Many of these stories have a truly Gothic flavor with their groans, mysterious rustlings, and clanking chains.

Informants are likely to tell the inquirer a ghost story that can be explained from natural causes. While these figments of the imagination cannot be accepted by the collector of folklore, they are of a certain interest, since they seem to confirm the apparently deep-rooted belief of the informant in an invisible world. Among the examples that follow, two such spurious ghost stories are included to indicate a certain flair on the part of some informants for seeing the supernatural in everyday happenings.

3. *The Avenging Voice*

Informant: Mrs. Emma Rexroat, at Iowa City, Iowa, a former resident of upper Egypt.

After a woman died, each night she came wailing down the hills. They could follow her by her cries around the bends and curves of the road, but could never catch up with her. People thought she was trying to avenge a wrong against her daughter and a family with three girls was suspicioned.

One night one of the girls slipped out of an upstairs window and went up into the hills back of the house trying to locate the voice they had heard, but without success. Next night, all three planned to go out together. A big storm was coming up as they planned to start out and they hesitated to go. Finally though, they went.

The old folks knew nothing about this; they thought the girls were safe in bed in their room. As the storm raged, the mother said, "I never had a storm skeer me like this before, I just feel like something was a-going to happen." Just as she said this, there was a terrible crash; the lightning lit up the room and through the storm came the most awful inhuman laughter that anyone ever heard.

Frightened, the father and mother went up to the girls' room. Not one of the three was there! All night they searched for them. Everyone around had heard the crazy laughter.

¹⁴ Recently destroyed by fire. General Grant had his headquarters in this hotel from September, 1861 to April, 1862. His room was a mecca for visitors.

After a while, they found a big tree that had been struck by lightning. All three girls were lying there dead. "After that," said the mother, "never a wail came out of them hills. It was all finished."

(Reports of voices are heard from Cave-in-Rock, out-of-the-way village on the Ohio River. These voices are believed to be death omens (banshee?). In one case, death occurred thirty minutes after the voice called. Motif E 230 *Return from the dead to inflict punishment.*)

4. *Impish Tantrums*

Collected from Mrs. Mary Trugaw, St. Francisville.

An old lady in St. Francisville sold her cookstove to a man who promised to pay her funeral expenses instead of giving her the price of the stove in ready cash. He didn't do as he promised. Every time his wife tried to get a meal and cook on the stove, the stove lids would fly off. So he went to the priest and told him about it. "Have you made any promises lately?" asked the priest. Then the man had to confess that he had promised to pay the old woman's funeral expenses in return for the stove but that he hadn't done it yet. Then the priest told him to go right away and pay off his debt as quickly as he could. So the man did this and after that he and his wife had no more trouble about being able to cook on the stove, and the stovelids never flew off again.

(The antics of the stove-lids are reminiscent of the vagaries of New England witches of other days and of those ascribed to the famous Bell Witch of Tennessee and Mississippi. Impish tricks of goblins and other evil spirits under the influence of witches are discussed by Kittredge, *op. cit.*, Chapter 13—G. P. S.)

See Motifs E 235 *Return from the dead to punish indignities to corpse, or ghost*; E 235.2 *Ghost returns to demand proper burial.* —The Editor.)

5. *Ghost Reprimands Disregarding of Instructions*

Informant: Mrs. Mary Trugaw, St. Francisville.

There was an old lady who told her folks not to put her dust cap on her head when she died. They put it on anyhow. The next morning after the funeral, they found the dust cap on her bed. Everyone thought she came back and brought back the dust cap.

(Motif E 320 *Friendly return of the dead.*)

6. *Return to Inflict Punishment*

Informant: Mrs. Cordelia Kelly, Carbondale, now deceased.

A man was dying. He was in bed downstairs. His wife was upstairs doing her spring sewing. The racket of the sew-

ing machine annoyed the dying man. He wanted to get up and go upstairs. He fought to get out of bed, but they didn't let him, and he died.

"Now, if I'd a been there," said a neighbor, who later spent a night in that same house, "I'd a helped him up and I'd a helped him down. What causes people to come back and hant us is an uneasy, unsatisfied mind. If you go out of this world satisfied, you're not going to come back, but if you go out unsatisfied or uneasy, you're going to come back. Why, I couldn't sleep at night in that house. He drug the machine back and forth across the floor all night so I couldn't sleep a wink for the racket.

(Motif E 230 *Ghost returns from dead to inflict punishment.*)

7. *The Pursuing Coffin*

Informant: Mrs. Lulu Nave, Carbondale.

A man was walking toward the cemetery. Some boys were with him. He wasn't going to the cemetery for anything special, but was going through it because it was a short cut to where he was going to visit a sick friend. All of a sudden, they saw a coffin floating in the air, and . . . it was coming toward them! They were terribly frightened and didn't know what to do. They tried in every way to avoid the coffin, running round and round trying to dodge it, but they couldn't get away from it nohow. So they turned back and had to take another road to where they were going. When they came back on the way home, they looked for the place where they saw the coffin and, sure enough, there were their footprints running all around. They all said the coffin was a death sign, for the man they had visited that night died soon afterwards.

(Numerous examples of cemetery tales are found in Egypt. The many isolated community graveyards adjacent to little country churches furnish ideal settings for variations of this type. This is the first example found in this area by the writer of a levitated object.)

8. *Headless Phantom*

Informant: Mrs. W. F. Lamb, Cairo.

A country preacher was traveling along a path through the woods on a donkey. He had to pass through a cemetery and, as they came to it, the preacher thought he saw a something rise up from behind one of the gravestones. It looked like a man, but it was headless. The old preacher believed in spirits. He was convinced the donkey saw the ghost too, for the animal refused to budge and kept snorting. The preacher kept saying, "Whoa, Betsy Jane, I never knew you to act this-a-way

before." He couldn't get the donkey to go either way. After some time, the phantom disappeared and he continued his journey.

(Here we have several new motifs: F 585 *The headless phantom*, B 733 *Animals are spirit-sighted*, E 421.1.2 *Ghost visible to horses alone*.)

9. *Two Spurious Ghosts*

A.

In a vacant house, the sun shone on a pane of glass so it seemed like a ghost. I didn't get to see it. She rocked back and forth in a rocking chair.

A neighbor came in to see me and said, "Let's go down and see the ghost." So her and I got ready. We met a crowd comin' back, and they said, "Well, you needn't go; the ghost is gone!" "What are you tellin' me?" says I.

There was a sapling in front of the house. A man was there and when he bent the sapling this way and that or when the wind blew, she (the ghost) just came a-tearin'. So he showed them. But he had no business to spoil it until I got there!

B.

I went to see a hanted house. People wouldn't stay in it. They would move in and then move out. So a crowd of us got on the train and went down to see it. You could see the woman through the window. She had on a gown with a collar and she was dignified and dainty.

Later, the paper told about this "ghost." A photographer had lived formerly in this house and when a window glass got broken, he put in one of his old negatives. The glass just fit. It was the picture of an old lady. When they took out that pane of glass, that done up the ghost.

III. SIMPLE JACK TALES

The two numskull stories below were brought to Illinois, straight from County Downs, Ireland, by immigrants in 1840. They settled in and around Chester, where they built up an Irish community.

10. *The Village Fool*

Informant: Miss Lulu Kelly, Carbondale, who heard the stories from her Scotch-Irish father when a child.

Jack was sent to the store to buy liver, lights and heart. He kept saying over to himself on the way, "Liver and lights, and heart" so he wouldn't forget what he was to buy. Pretty

soon he came to a man who was drunk and sick at the side of the road. Jack was still saying aloud, "Liver and lights and all." The man heard him and said, "Don't say that!" Jack stopped and said, "What shall I say then?" And the man answered, "Say 'Some come up; hope that never more come up.'"

So Jack went along saying this and pretty soon he came to where a farmer was sowing grain. The farmer heard Jack saying as he passed, "Some come up; hope never more come up." Then the farmer called, "Don't say that!" and again Jack asked, "What shall I say then?" "Say 'I hope they come up by thousands.'" Well, Jack went along saying this and pretty soon he met a funeral and the undertaker, hearing him, said, "Don't say that; say, 'God rest all poor souls!'"

So Jack went along saying "God rest all poor souls!" After a while some men came along, leading a dog to be hung. When they heard Jack saying, "God rest all poor souls!" they called to him, "Don't say that! Say 'I'm leading a bitch to be hanged!'" Lastly Jack met a wedding party on their way to church. When they heard him say, "I'm leading a bitch to be hanged," they chased him and gave him a thrashing and when he got home he got another.

(An example of Type 1696, Motif J 2461 *What should I have said?* For variants see Aarne-Thompson, *Types of the Folk-Tale*, FF *Communications*, (Helsinki, 1928), No. 74, p. 195.)

11. Jack and the Sheep's Head*

Informant: Miss Kelly.

Jack was left at home to mind the house while the rest of the family went to church. He was to tend the fire and watch the pot in which a sheep's head with dumplings was boiling. All went well for a time, but after a while the pot began to bubble and to boil over. Jack didn't know what to do. Finally, he ran to the church, motioned to his mother from the door and beckoned to her to come outside. All she did was to shake her head. Jack kept on with his motions, but the mother paid no attention. At last Jack called, "Now, none of your winkin' and blinkin'. The sheep's head is butting all the dumplings out of the pot!"

(Curiously enough, the incident of the sheep's head appears in Joel Chandler Harris, *Told By Uncle Remus* (New York, 1905), in the story, "The Hard Headed Woman," p. 287. There is no likelihood of any contact between Harris and the informant's father. It is possible that the story may have been heard by southern Negroes from European settlers.

This theory has frequently been suggested to account for echoes of foreign lore in Negro tales.)

IV. TALL TALES

Tall tales in Egypt are just as tall as elsewhere. They reflect the general type of exaggeration commonly found in lying tales: extreme cold, monster mosquitoes, prodigious leaps, great hunts, planetary bullets, fast-growing vines, immense vegetables, and so on. Some of these tales echo the exploits of Baron Munchausen, or at least may be said to have been influenced by these extravaganzas. Some of the current "lies" told at Old Men's Clubs or at a local Liar's Bench fairly set a new record for this type of tale. Most of the examples that follow are of the old-time, dependable variety.

12. *They Got the Coon (skin)*

Informant: Miss Alice Milligan, Carbondale.

Down by Galum Creek, some men went hunting coons. They wanted the skins to sell. After a long time, they treed a coon or two, but for some reason the coons got away and made a dash for the river near by. All was excitement and eagerness to get the coons. Well, when the coons got to the river, they tried to swim across. It was a very cold night and grew colder all the time and started to freeze. The river froze so fast, the coons were caught in the ice and couldn't get away. Well, sir, them coons just jumped out of their skins and ran off up the further bank. Then the hunters got the skins.

(See my story, "The Cold Snap in Thebes," *JAFL*, vol. 54 (1941), p. 50; *HFB*, vol. 1 (1942), pp. 14-15, 92-93 (variants are cited at end of these tales); Vance Randolph, *Ozark Mountain Folks* (New York, 1932), pp. 162-163.—G. P. S. Motifs X 922 *The nailed wolf's tail*, X 921.2 *The rabbit catch; rabbits freeze feet fast to ice at night.*)

13. *Too Busy to Lie*

Informant: Miss Tina Goodwin, Carbondale.

Some men were going by our house, one of them noted as a story-teller. My mother called out to him, "John, come in and tell us a story." "No," answered John as he hurried along, "I haven't got time. My wife is sick and I'm on my way to the doctor's house. I'd rather lose my best cow than lose her. . . ." and he was gone.

Later they found out his wife was hale and hearty.

(This is Type 1920 B. See *HFB*, vol. I (1942), pp. 13-14; *Hoosier Tall Stories* (Federal Writer's Project, 1937), p. 9.)

14. *Davy Crockett and Old Bounce*

Informant: Mrs. W. F. Lamb, Cairo.

Davy used to hunt with hounds. One day the dogs got to running hard and fast through a thicket of saplings. Old Bounce was with the dogs. He ran so fast that he split himself wide open on a sapling. What did Davy do then? Well, sir, he stopped just long enough to pick up the two pieces and slap them together. This worked just fine except that he got one half of Old Bounce one way and the other half just opposite. He was in a desperate hurry not to let the other dogs get too far ahead. So Old Bounce went on this-a-way: When his one half got too tired running, he just flopped over and the other half began running.

(Stories attached to Crockett are still told by persons on the Illinois-Kentucky border. Whether the one below belongs with the classic Crockett tales is uncertain. Compare B. A. Botkin, *A Treasury of American Folklore* (New York, 1944), pp. 593-594 (taken from "Skitt" (H. E. Taliaferro), *Fisher's River Scenes and Characters* (New York, 1859) pp. 149-151.) This story, "Larkin Snow, the Miller, and His Fast-Running Dog," is a close analogue to the above story, making a guess plausible that the basic incidents of the story are attached to various persons.—G. P. S.

See also Harold W. Thompson, *Body, Boots & Britches* (Philadelphia, 1940), p. 295 and *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (Pantheon Books Inc., 1944) pp. 50-51. The latter is the story of a hare with an extra set of legs on its back.—The Editor.)

15. *The Mules and the Sassafras***

Informant: Wendell Margrave, Thebes.

There was an old feller lived out in Pigeon Roost Holler an' he had to go to Olive Branch to get groceries. While he was in town there came a hard rain. To get home he had to go up Mount Zion Hill. The road was soft an' he had a fair heavy load. Well, the upshot was them mules pulled all right 'til they got most to the top of the hill; then they stuck in the mud there. Then Uncle Ben got out of the wagon and pushed and pushed and them mules did their best. But that wasn't enough. So the mules reached out and each grabbed a mouthful of sassafras roots, and that was enough for them to bring the wagon to the top of the hill.

16. *The Big Radish**

Informant: Mr. Ella McDaniel, New Burnside.

A man had an immense radish. On the Ohio River another man was hammering on a mammoth iron kettle. When asked

what the kettle was for he replied, "To cook the big radish in."

(Motif X 1024 *The great vegetable*; Motif X 1035 *The great kettle*. Among numerous variants the following may be mentioned: *HFB* vol. 1 (August, 1942), pp. 50-51; *Hoosier Tall Stories* (Federal Writer's Project, 1937), pp. 26-27; Thomas Roscoe, tr., *The Italian Novelists* (London and New York, 1892), p. 341 (Ortensio Lando, Novella 6); Harold W. Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-140; Bernard DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America* (Boston, 1932), p. 151; B. A. Botkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 602-604.)

17. The "White" Indian

Informant: Dr. Jesse W. Harris, Carbondale.

A white Indian came from Canada all the way to Kaskaskia. He settled there. Telling about his journey, he said he had with him in the canoe a chicken-coop with two chickens in it and that he went over Niagara Falls on the way and never lost a chicken!

(Compare with the story of Tim Murphy who, fleeing from Indians, jumped off a two-hundred foot cliff without losing a drop of milk from the bucket he carried. Harold W. Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 60.—The Editor.)

V. FORMULA TALES

18. An Unfinished Tale

Informant: Miss Tina Goodwin, Carbondale.

Two girls thought they would like to know how it feels to die, so they decided to try it. One was to hang the other up and cut her down when she showed signs of strangling. On reviving, she was to describe her sensations.

It happened as planned. Just as the girl in the noose was about gone, a band began to play outside. Her companion ran to the window to watch the band awhile and when she came back, she was horrified to find her friend dead. She didn't know what to do, but she cut the body down and set it on a chair by the window. Then she ran off.

Shortly after, the grocer boy came by with a basket of rotten aples he was taking to the woods to throw away. He noticed the girl at the window and called, "Hello!" As he got no answer, he called again and then he shouted as loud as he could, "If you don't speak I'll throw a rotten apple at you!" Still no answer. So the boy threw the apple; it hit the girl on the head and she fell off the chair.

Thinking he had killed the girl, the boy went inside and, of course, found that she was dead. So he picked her up and put her on his shoulder and carried her to the woods where he

propped her up near a tree. A little while later, a hunter came along, hunting squirrels. When he saw the girl, he was sure he had shot her. So he put the girl on his back and took her to the village shoemaker's house. There the shoemaker had all his little tools spread out on a table. (Story-teller enumerates all the tools he can think of, then asks quite innocently).

"What's that little tool the shoemaker uses to punch the holes with?"

"Awl?" suggests the gullible listener.

"That's all!"

(A blend of Types 2200 and 2250; Motifs Z2 and Z5. The story is "going around" Egypt.—G. P. S.)

This story also seems to be related to Type 1537 *The Corpse Killed Five Times*.—The Editor.)

VI. JOKES AND ANECDOTES

In this group, stories are included which have a real folklore flavor—those that reveal deep-seated superstitious notions, backwoods humor, and frailties of the Egyptian countryman which have become the nucleus for amusing jests. These pass from mouth to mouth and from town to town.

19. *The Draper and the Bible*

Informant: Mrs. Lollar, Carbondale.

A man kept a general store. His clerk was told that he must be on the "up and up" in everything. One morning, a woman came into the store and wanted to purchase some cloth. The clerk brought out the material asked for and priced it at \$1.50 a yard. The customer said it wouldn't do. So she began to look around at other goods displayed on the counter. While she was looking, the clerk busied himself at the shelves, apparently looking for something to suit. After a while, he took up the *same* piece he had showed her at first, spread it out and commented, "Cheap at \$7.00 a yard!" The woman took the goods, now satisfied.

Later the clerk told the owner of the store about his little ruse. "How in the world can you justify such a sale?" said he. "You know you were to make no sale that you could not square by the Bible." The clerk replied, "She was a stranger, and I took her in!"

(The source of this story is still uncertain. An almost word-for-word analogue was recently sent to the writer by Mrs. Elva Kimball Walker, from Mascoma, N. H. Surprisingly, the variant below turned up in Illinois at an unexpected moment.)

20. *The Magic Ax*

Informant: Dr. Sherman Barnes, formerly of Carbondale.

A doctor was called to visit a patient back in the "sticks." He was a favorite with the hill-folk of Egypt since he never laughed at their customs or superstitions. When he arrived at the man's cabin, he found him in bed and burning up with fever. He turned down the bed covers to examine the man's chest and there was an ax in bed with him. "What's the ax for?" questioned the doctor, trying not to show his surprise. The patient replied weakly, "It's to cut the fever." Instead of throwing out the ax and scolding, all the doctor did was to reverse the position of the ax, saying as he did so, "But you've got it in the wrong way." Then he gave the patient some pills and left. The man got well.

(Motifs D 1206 *The magic ax*, D 1335 *Magic ax gives strength*.)

21. *A Coon Story*

Informant: Name and residence overlooked.

A darky shot a coon. After chasing the coon, he was tired and sleepy. He couldn't do anything about skinning and cooking the coon just then, so he lay down beside the dead coon and fell asleep. In the meantime, some stragglers came along. Seeing the dead coon on the ground and the darky asleep, they decided to cook and eat the coon themselves, then and there. They did this and made a good meal. Then they ran away before the sleeper could wake up. Just before they left, they smeared a lot of coon grease around the darky's mouth. Shortly after the thieves left, the darky awoke. He rubbed his hands over his lips and chin in astonishment, smacked his lips and licked them, saying, "That's the first time coon's meat set well on my stomach!"

(This story is similar to Joel Chandler Harris's "The Man Who Had the Possum" in *Uncle Remus and His Friends* (Boston and New York, 1892), pp. 147-153.)

VII. ROPE-SKIPPING RHYMES

If a rope were stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific and all the little children in the country were jumping it, many of them would be chanting identical or similar rhymes to those below. That little Egyptians know some of these widespread jingles will be evident from a few following representatives from the Carbondale and the Makanda area. Most of those reproduced here are through the courtesy of Miss Tina Goodwin, teacher in the primary grades of the Carbon-

dale Brush School. The last two have been contributed by Betty Mott of Makanda, herself a rope-skipper. The rhymes follow:

1.

Johnny over the ocean,
Johnny over the sea,
Johnny broke a milk bottle,
And blamed it onto me.
I told Ma,
Ma told Pa;
Johnny got a whipping,
Ha, ha, ha.
How many whippings
Did he get?
(Count until there is a miss.)

2.

Changing bedrooms one by one
Changing bedrooms two by two
Changing bedrooms three by three.

(This goes on until no more can get "in." After the rope is full, they are let out, one by one.)

3.

Old man Daisy (skip)
He went crazy (skip)
Up the ladder (skip to right)
Down the ladder (skip to left)
Zider, zider,
Billy-goat rider!
(Skip until there is a miss.)

4.

Down in the valley,
Where the green grass grows,
There is ————— (girl's name)
Sweet as a rose.
Along came ————— (boy's name),
And kissed her
On the nose
(Skip until there is a miss.)

5.

I was born in a frying-pan,
Just to see how old I am.
(Count as long as you can.)

6.

Sally drank marmalade,
Sally drank beer;
Sally drank everything
That made her feel queer.

Chorus

A-whoopsie went the marmalade,
A-whoopsie went the beer,
A-whoopsie went everything
That made her feel queer.
Sally ate a pickle,
Sally ate a pie
Sally ate everything
That made her feel queer.

Chorus

A-whoopsie went the pickle,
A-whoopsie went the pie,
A-whoopsie went everything
That made her feel queer.

(After each "A-whoopsie," jump forward a foot or so).

VIII. OCCASIONAL JINGLES

The geographical distribution of these jingles is indicated in parentheses.

1.

Snow or blow,
I'm bound to go,
With my beau.

(from Centralia)

2.

Rain or shine,
This girl's mine:

(from Centralia)

3.

Under the window in stormy weather,
I marry this man and woman together.
Let none but him who rules the thunder,
Put this man and woman asunder.

(from Cobden)

4.

Happy is a cat,
Happy is a kitten,

Happy is the boy
Who never gets the mitten.
(Cobden, 1868)

5.

Little head, little wit;
Big head, not a bit.
(Cobden)

6.

When you get married,
And live on a hill,
Send me a kiss,
By the whip-poor-will.
(from Eldorado)

7.

Remember well
And bear in mind,
A jay-bird's tail
Sticks out behind.
(from Mt. Vernon)

8.

Rabbit in the rail-pile
Punch him out quick.
Get a twister on him,
With a long prong stick.
Watch him on the north side,
Watch him on the high;
There he goes. Sic him, Tige.
Yi, yi, yi!
(from Stonefort)

IX. SIGNS AND SUPERSTITIONS

1. *The Weather*

Egyptians live, in a measure, by their weather lore. Since the community is essentially agricultural and, unfortunately, droughts are common, rain is often fervently wished for by farmers for the fruitful yield of crops. The townsman likewise scans the heavens—or the almanac—for propitious or unpropitious signs for his undertakings. The Egyptian agriculturist, like his parents and grandparents, plants and reaps by phases of the moon and by signs of the zodiac; with the same care he breeds his stock and poultry. Some of the weather signs which are found in Egypt are:

1.

Sun red at morning,
Sailor's warning;
Sun red at night,
Sailor's delight.

2.

Morning red and evening gray,
Helps the traveler on his way.
Evening gray and morning red,
Brings down rain on the traveler's head.

3.

Rainbow in the morning, a shepherd's warning;
Rainbow at night, a shepherd's delight.

4.

Blest be the bride the sun shines on;
Curst be the bride the rain falls on.

5.

Between one and two, we'll know,
What it's going to do.

6.

A mottled sky means:
Never long wet and never long dry.

7.

Thunder before seven, rain before eleven;
Rain before seven, stop before eleven.

8. When mare's tails are seen in the sky, it is a sign of
foul or falling weather.

9. If you kill a spider, it will rain.

10. If you kill a snake and hang it on the fence, it will
rain.

11. If a cock crows before three o'clock in the morning,
it will rain or be bad weather for three days.

12. If it rains on Monday, it will rain for three days that
week.

13. If a cat eats grass or the fire pops, it will rain or
snow.

14. If the smoke floats west or if there is no dew, it will
rain.

15. If the sun sets behind a bank on Sunday night, it
will rain on Wednesday night.

16. If the sun sets behind a bank on Thursday night, it
will rain the next day.

17. Rain standing on the leaves of a tree is a sure sign that it isn't over.

18. Stars in the moon's circle mean rain.

19. If a tame swan flies against the wind, it will rain.¹⁵

20. If a pigeon washes itself, it will rain.

21. If a horse paws the ground or neighs, the weather will soon change.

22. If the weather clears during the night, it won't stay clear very long.

23. If a hen crows, there's going to be a flood.

24. For every fog in summer, so many snows in winter.

25. If corn shucks are heavy, it's going to be a hard winter.

26. If the bark on the north side of a birch tree bursts in summer, the winter following will be bad.

27. On whatever day of the month the first snow falls, there will be so many snows that winter.

28. If animals have heavy pelts, 'tis the sign of a hard winter.

29. If smoke floats to the south, there will be snow.

30. If it thunders a certain day in December, it will frost the same day in May.

31. If a turtle snaps at you, it won't turn loose until it thunders.

32. Lightning does not strike twice in the same place.

33. Lightning in south, sign of drought.

2. Love and Marriage

1. Someone will kiss you, if you have a hair in your mouth.

2. You are in love if you have cold hands.

3. Winking at someone with your right eye is as good as saying, "I love you."

4. Sitting on the table is a sign that a girl wants to be married.

(Compare an Indiana jingle: Sit on the table,

Marry before you're able.

—The Editor)

¹⁵ For records of swans on Middle Western rivers in the early 1800's see Edward F. Dunne, *Illinois, the Heart of the Nation* (Chicago and New York, 1933) vol. 1, p. 4; Donald Culross Peattie, *Audubon's America* (Boston, 1940), pp. 144, 291, 297.

5. If a boy hates cats, he'll be a bachelor.
6. If you find a hairpin on the sidewalk, stick it in the nearest tree and you will see your lover before night.
7. Go to a spring the first day of May and you'll see your casket or your future wife or husband.
8. Throw pieces of your fingernails or toenails into the fire and your lover will come.
9. If you dream three nights in a week of a boy, you will marry him.
10. If lovers burn their letters, they will quarrel.
11. If you put two forks at a plate, there will be a wedding.
12. Old prophecies about the color of the wedding gown:¹⁶

White—you choose right.

Blue—you'll always be true.

Green—you'll be ashamed to be seen.

Brown—you'll live out of town.

Yellow—you choose the wrong fellow.

Black—you'll wish yourself back.

Red—you'll wish yourself dead.

13. If you look in the well on the first day of May at noon, holding a mirror so the sun reflects to the water, you will see the image of your future husband.

14. Set a "dumb" supper, leaving an empty chair between each two girls. The persons appearing in the empty chairs are the future husbands. If a chair remains empty, the girl by it will be an old maid.¹⁷

15. If you hang the "pully" bone of a chicken above a door, the first man who comes in will be your husband.

16. If it rains on your wedding day, you will shed as many tears as raindrops that fall.

3. Dreams

1. If you dream of an accident, it is well not to travel for some time.

2. If you dream of apples, you will have success in undertakings.

¹⁶ Rayburn, O. E., *Ozark Country* (New York, 1941), p. 212. Exactly the same jingle occurs in the Ozark hills of Egypt. The order is reversed in the above version.

¹⁷ Compare Kittredge, *op. cit.*, p. 432, n. 11 and Rayburn, *op. cit.*, p. 420.

3. If you dream of being angry, you face disappointment.
4. If you dream of a baby crying, ill health.
5. Of a cold bath, good news and good health, or, of a warm bath, evil effects.
6. Of a camera, unpleasant prospects.
7. Of a clock, injury from an enemy.
8. Of diamonds, good fortune.
9. Of a cat, bad luck.
10. Of emeralds, you will inherit property.
11. Of gold, success in commercial enterprises.
12. Of being hot, betrayal by a friend.
13. Of a neighbor, warning of gossip.
14. Of seeing oysters, prosperity and health.
15. Of pearls, good business prospects.
16. Of pickles, business reverses.
17. Of a rainbow, unexpected happenings.
18. Of salt, unpleasant relations.
19. Of snakes, a keen disappointment.
20. Of teeth being filled, a recovery of lost valuables.
21. Dream of the dead, you'll hear from the living.

4. *Good and Bad Luck*

A. Things that bring good luck:

1. To find a four-leafed clover.
2. To carry the left hind-foot of a rabbit.
3. To carry a "bull's-eye" in your pocket.
4. To see a pin with its point toward you. ("See a pin . . .")
5. To have a black and white cat cross your path if you touch the *white* spot on the cat.
6. To dream of white horses.
7. To have a stray black cat come to live with you.

B. Things that bring bad luck:

1. Three on a match.
2. Opening an umbrella in the house.
3. Coming back if you have started out.
4. Carrying a spade or hoe through the house.
5. Starting on a journey on Friday.
6. Sewing a button on a garment on Friday.
7. Starting a garment on Friday.
8. Meeting a funeral procession.

9. Hearing a cock crow before dawn or a dog howling before sunup.
10. Rocking an empty rocking chair.
11. Borrowing salt if you don't pay it back.
12. Do not step over a broom or take a broom from one house to another if you move.
13. Do not go swimming in dog days; if you do you will get sick.
14. Do not drink where a mad dog has drunk or you will go mad.
15. An opal brings bad luck.
16. If you break a mirror you will have seven years bad luck.
17. The first time you see a new moon you will have as much bad luck as what you are carrying in your hand (bucket, basket, pitcher, etc.) will hold.
18. Sweep your house after dark
Brings sorrow to your heart

5. *Death Omens*

1. If you plant a weeping willow, when it gets large enough to shade your barn you will die.
2. It is unlucky to plant a cedar tree for the same reason.¹⁸
3. When a sick person picks at the bed-covers, it is a sure sign of oncoming death.

Other death signs:

4. Sneezing at the breakfast table.
5. Dreaming of a wedding.
6. Breaking a mirror suddenly without visible reason.
7. Walking over a person who is lying on the floor (you must walk back over him).
8. Hearing a ticking (death-tick) in the wall.
9. Seeing a light on a post in the dooryard.
10. A very bad sign is when a bird flies through a window into the house.

6. *Children*

1. If a baby looks into a mirror before it is a year old, it will die.

¹⁸ A widespread popular belief attaches a baleful influence to the willow, cedar, cypress, and walnut. See Angelo de Gubernatis, *La Mythologie des Plantes* (Paris, 1822), vol. 1, p. 159; vol. 2, p. 118.

2. A baby will die if it doesn't fall off the bed before it is a year old.

3. Do not cut a child's fingernails before he is a year old; if you do, he will be a thief.

4. Children come from cabbages, the garden, the cellar, the parsley bed, rosebushes, and so on.

7. *Cats*

1. A cat has nine lives.

2. A cat always lights on its feet.

3. They suck a baby's breath.

4. They are color blind.

5. They are attached to persons and places and cannot be moved.

8. *Miscellaneous Superstitions*

1. If you want to talk with the dead, go to the graveyard at night. Take the liver of a black chicken and leave it at the crossroads. Take a knife and stick it in the middle of a grave; then the person in the grave will come and talk to you.

2. If you make a cross with two matches tied together and leave it on the doorstep of a person you dislike, that person will have bad luck until the cross is destroyed.

3. If you run from a blue racer, it will chase you; if you chase it, it will run from you.

4. If you kill the first snake you see in the spring, you will rid yourself of an enemy.

5. If your leg or foot is cut off and you don't take the shoe off, that foot or leg will hurt until the shoe is taken off.

6. If a bodily member is cut off and buried, it will hurt you until it is dug up and righted, if misplaced.

7. When shoes squeak, it's a sign they aren't paid for.

8. When you stack hay, put rocks in the stacks and the lightning will never strike them.

9. When all the children born are boys, it is a sign of war.

10. If there is a W on the wings of the seventeen-year locust, that is a sure sign of war.

11. Use a "mad stone" for the bite of a mad dog.¹⁹

12. Copper wound around the neck or wrists protects against witches. (Motif 1385.5.1)

¹⁹ Actual possession and use of a mad stone in the vicinity is reported.

13. When you have a tooth pulled, throw it over your left shoulder into the fire and a gold tooth will come in.²⁰

14. When you see a white horse, never look at it a second time, but make a wish and it will come true.

15. When you find a hairpin, you have found a friend.

X. FOLK MEDICINE

Remedies used by early-day Egyptians are still resorted to back in the hills of lower Egypt. Old granny brews of those days took the place of modern prescriptions. Fortunately enough, the Illinois terrain produced roots, barks, and herbs that were of help to pioneer settlers and doctors in treating many mild physical upsets of either adults or children. First aid in such cases were brews of different sorts.

For teas, there was a choice of catnip, horehound, pumpkin-seed, Jerusalem oak, pinkroot, rattlesnake weed, plantain root, sage, smartweed, white-oak bark, slippery elm, milkweed root, sumac bark and berries, boneset, raspberry or mullein leaves, dandelion, tansy, sassafras, sarsaparilla, sycamore chips, "sheeps pills," and red-root, to say nothing of that seemingly all-purpose plant, the pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*). This is a coarse perennial with white flowers and really evil-looking berries. It has many uses in the Egyptian domestic pharmacopoeia, while the leaves, wilted and lightly sauteed, are said to be a delicious substitute for the more frequent delicacy, turnip greens. The medicinal potency of the pokeweed may be noted from recommended uses below:

Cures

1. Aching feet: carry a double cedar knot in your pocket, or, tie a salt mackerel on the sole of your foot.

2. Cancer (old recipe, 1868): take narrow-leaved dock root, boil in hot water and wash the ulcer with it as warm as it can be borne. Fill the cavity with the liquor with it for two minutes. Then scrape the bulk of the root, bruise it fine, put it on gauze and lay it over every part of the ulcer. Apply a linen cloth in the tea and lay this over the gauze. Repeat this three times in 24 hours and, at each time, let the patient take a wine glass of the tea with one-third of a glass of port wine mixed with honey.

3. Catarrh: kiss the nostrils of a mule.

4. Common cold: use camomile tea, sipped hot at bed-

²⁰ See Leo Kanner, *Folklore of the Teeth* (New York, 1928).

time, followed up by quinine which has been wrapped or disguised in slippery elm.

5. Consumption: a cat-skin placed on your chest will cure.

6. Corns: spit on the corn and later you can pick it out.

7. Fever blisters: the next time you see a billygoat, grab some of his whiskers and apply to the sore; it will vanish.

8. Freckles: wash your face in the dew of the first day of May and they will disappear.

9. Gas: raise your right arm up and down three times; this will cure the gas.

10. Hives: any hot tea.

11. Illness (specific case not indicated): bleeding.

12. Neuritis: thread a needle three times and tie it around your neck at night; in the morning, the pain will be over.

13. Nosebleed: tie a coin or piece of lead around your neck.

14. Pain in side: spit under a rock and the pain will go to the rock.

15. Rabies: the stomach of every deer contains a "mad-stone" which will cure you if bitten by a mad dog.

16. Ringworm: A witch in Murphysboro is said to have cured this ailment by spitting on the affected part.

17. Rheumatism: carry a buckeye (bull's-eye); carrying a few potatoes in your pocket; eat barberries; soak pokeberries in whiskey and drink the decoction—sure cure!

18. Skin bleaching: make a rubbing ointment by soaking tansy leaves in buttermilk for a few days.

19. Skin blemishes: rubbing the skin with the after-birth will cure skin blemishes.

20. Scarlet fever: keep away from trees; the Indians told the people that scarlet fever was everywhere in trees.

21. Sore throat: wear a woolen sock, wrong side out, around the throat or put on a poultice of salt pork, or make a tea of wild cherry bark mixed with shag-bark (called "scaly bark" in Egypt). Tie a string around your neck at night.

22. T. B.: drink goat's milk.

23. Thrash: let a man who has never seen his father blow in the baby's mouth.

24. Tisic[sic]: Measure the baby's height on a tree and make a hole at this point in the tree. Then cut off a lock of the baby's hair and put it in the hole. When the bark of

the tree grows so as to cover the place, the baby will be well.

25. Tonsilitis: have a horse blow in your mouth or wear an old dirty sock around your neck, the dirtier, the better.

26. Warts: take a string and tie a knot in it for every wart. Then take the string to the crossroads and bury it.

27. Whooping cough: let the patient crawl under a mule and the cough will go away.

XI. HORTICULTURE

Here is a large field for research, for some of the country's best peaches and apples come from Egypt and pickers come from all over the South to gather the fruit in the immense orchards. Whipping a tree with a switch has been practiced in this community.²¹

In the foregoing pages, other subjects have clamored for a place: little folk stories in connection with place names, traditions of the rivers and railroads; of the orchards, forests, and farms; of the old-time beliefs of the farmer "who tickles the earth."²² Some of the sources which should fascinate the collector are the vast bituminous coal fields of Egypt and the Ozark hills²³ where who knows how many curious and unaccounted for customs and practices are waiting for a conscientious and sympathetic recorder!

Egypt, we may say, is still on a folklore frontier. Little research has been undertaken in the past in Egyptian communities for study and collection of the traditional lore of the area. Although some effort in the past by enthusiastic collectors—who perceived these valuable traditions to be slipping away—has resulted in preserving a modicum of the popular lore of Southern Illinois, the section, even so, presents an almost untouched field.

²¹ See Frazer, vol. 4, p. 236n; vol. 9, pp. 262-272; vol. 10, pp. 61-66 ff. Also Mannhardt, *Wald u. Feld Kulte*, vol. 1, p. 300.

²² Perrin, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

²³ A spur of the Ozarks runs up into Southern Illinois, 100 miles in length and 75 in width. Beginning a few miles south of Carbondale, the scenery is very rugged; its isolated communities offer exceptional possibilities for the collector.

TALES COLLECTED FROM INDIANA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

By H. D. HARTIKKA

I. TALL TALES

1. *Hunter Drowns Ducks*

Contributed by Carolyn McConahay of Indianapolis, Indiana, November 26, 1945. She heard it from her father.

One cold fall day a man went duck hunting. He was bundled up heavily to keep warm. His rifle was with him to do the shooting. A group of ducks passed over; he aimed and shot at them. The ducks didn't even scatter. Instead, they came down and lit on the water. They just seemed to be enjoying themselves. The hunter was angry because he hadn't hit even one duck. He aimed his gun and shot again. Again he missed because the ducks put their bodies down in the water. He shot at them several times, and every time they would duck under the water.

The hunter soon lost his anger and tried to find a reason for the behavior of the ducks—they didn't seem to be afraid of him or his gun. He finally decided that the reason the ducks put their heads under water was because of the smoke from his gun; he also determined not to go home without a duck. He took out his pipe very calmly, stuffed it with tobacco, and then lit it. He blew smoke as hard and as fast as he could at the ducks. The ducks ducked under the water and wouldn't come up to breathe because of the smoke. It wasn't long before every last duck was drowned. The hunter had a holiday! He gathered up all the drowned ducks and went home, a happy man.

(Lowell Thomas, *Tall Stories* (New York and London, 1931), pp. 111-113.

2. *The Intelligent Bird Dog*

Contributed by Tony George of Indianapolis, Indiana, November 26, 1945.

It all started one spring when a certain Mr. Smith, who spent all his spare time hunting and fishing, let it be known to all his friends that he was in the market for a really good hunting dog. Several weeks later he received a letter from a man in New York who said that he had just the dog that the hunter was looking for. Mr. Smith decided to go to New

York to see the dog in action and to make plans for his purchase.

When he contacted the owner he was a little surprised to hear that the owner was asking better than six hundred dollars for the dog. They took the dog to Central Park for a trial, but his only point all afternoon was a man whose last name was Partridge. After very careful consideration Mr. Smith decided to buy the dog—mainly because it was such a beautiful creature.

The first time he took the dog hunting that fall the unforgettable incident occurred. The dog went behind a bush, while Mr. Smith stayed in front. Suddenly a quail flew out from behind the bush. He shot it, and as soon as he had ejected the shell, up came another quail. Mr. Smith shot it, and again as soon as the shell was ejected, another quail flew out. This kept up until he had shot nine birds without moving a step. Finally he couldn't stand it any longer, and his curiosity compelled him to go behind the bush to see what was going on. The dog was just lying there with his front legs over a covey of quail. Every time the dog had heard a shell ejected, he simply lifted his paws to let one more escape, then promptly smacked his paws down again.

(For the bird dog which lets birds out of a gopher hole one at a time see: Herbert Halpert, "Tales of a Mississippi Soldier," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, VIII (June, 1945), pp. 107-8; Ernest Baughman, "Two Student Tales," *Hoosier Folklore Bulletin*, IV. (June, 1945), pp. 35-36. For bird dog pointing at the shingle of an attorney, A. Partridge, see Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-15.)

3. *Shooting Off Toes*

Contributed by Helen Louise Meyer of Commiskey, Indiana, November 26, 1945. She heard it at Indiana University from a roommate, who, in turn, had heard it from her grandfather, a native of Nebraska; the grandfather claimed that the tale was about a haunted house that was actually in the small town in Nebraska in which he lived.

A colored man and a white man stood outside a haunted house. The white man wanted to prove that the colored man was a coward; so he bet him five dollars that he would not spend a night alone in the house. Fortunately the colored man had a revolver in his coat pocket, and he thought he would be quite safe in accepting the bet.

The colored man walked into the house, looked around, and saw a large divan in the corner. Since he was very tired he

decided to make himself comfortable while he waited through the night. He took off his shoes and stockings, lay back on the couch, and went to sleep. He was startled from his sleep by the striking of the clock; he gazed straight ahead and saw ten fingers reaching for him. He shot his revolver ten times, and each of the fingers fell in turn. Contented, he went back to sleep.

The next morning as he arose and started to dress, he looked down at his feet and discovered that some mysterious happening had occurred during the night: he was minus ten toes.

(I have a version of this from La Fontaine, Indiana.—The Editor.)

4. *The Wonderful Hunt*

Contributed by Jane Ann Phebus of Frankfort, Indiana, November 26, 1945. She heard it from a stranger, an old man who was sitting in front of a gasoline station, while on a trip through Kentucky.

One crisp autumn day quite a few years ago, Sam Allen, a local man, got out his double barrelled muzzle-loader and headed for Bottleneck Lake in the hills of Tennessee. He intended to shoot a duck for his supper. Well, Sam hunted all day without any success, and he became pretty tired and discouraged. He had just about decided to quit when he heard the familiar sound of wild ducks overhead. He quickly raised his gun, took careful aim, when bingo!—a fat, young rabbit ran right in front of him. Sam suddenly decided that he would rather have rabbit for his supper. He was just about to fire at the rabbit when he was startled to hear the deadly warning of a rattlesnake. He looked down to find the snake coiled at his feet. Sam, who was a quick thinker, pulled the trigger without a moment's hesitation. When the smoke cleared away he was amazed to find that the right barrel of the gun had killed three ducks, the left barrel had killed the rabbit, and the ramrod had gone down the snake's neck and choked it to death.

(For texts and full references see Herbert Halpert, "Tall Tales, Windies, and 'Just Plain Lies,'" *HFB*, I (June, 1942), pp. 20-21; for references to ramrod killing snake, see Herbert Halpert, "Indiana Storyteller," *HFB*, I (August, 1942), pp. 53-54.)

5. *The Ice Projectile*

Contributed by Wilfred Stapley of Cleveland, Ohio, November 26, 1945. He heard it from his grandfather.

The local sourdoughs were warming their feet on the pot-bellied stove in G. K. Gettle's general store one very cold

morning and were telling of their previous experiences on far colder days. My great-grandfather broke into the scoring column when he completed the story that went as follows:

I owe my very life to the fact that the thermometer was saying that it was far too cold for man or beast to be out in the elements. I was coming home from a very successful bear hunt and had a bearskin wrapped around me to help keep me warm. Just as I walked past the entrance to a cave an old she-bear stuck her head out and recognized the pelt I was wearing as her mate's. She lit out after me like a streak of greased lightning, and since I was weighted down by all those clothes I couldn't run very fast. She soon had me cornered in a little valley. I turned around and took my trusty shootin'-iron, poured a pound of black powder down the muzzle, and grabbed for a bullet. By Gadfrey!!! In my hasty retreat from the she-bear I had dropped my bag of bullets. And the bear was getting nearer and nearer; soon she would crush me in her grip; soon my wife would be a widow; and soon my three children would be orphans. Now you all know that I'm not a man to call it quits, even when the odds are long against me; but right then I thought of my poor wife and kids, and I started to cry. One teardrop fell on my lap, and it gave me an idea. When the next teardrop came out I made my eyelids form its size into the same calibre as my rifle's bore. I quickly forced the frozen teardrop down the muzzle of my gun and killed the bear an instant before she got to me.

(For, texts and references see Herbert Halpert, "Tall Tales Windies, and 'Just Plain Lies,'" *HFB*, I (June, 1942), p. 19.)

II. GHOST STORIES

6. *The Bell Witch*

Contributed by Mary Emily Moxley of Louisville, Kentucky, November 26, 1945. She heard it from her parents.

The children of Tennessee are still hearing stories from their grandparents about the Bell witch who is believed to still roam the countryside around Adam Station, Tennessee.

The Bell witch made her first appearance in 1735 to John Bell, who lived in England at the time. She told him that she would return every hundred years as long as a drop of Bell blood existed. In 1835 the Bell family, then living in Tennessee, experienced a similar visitation from the witch.

She was able to bestow favors on the Bell family and also bring tragedy into their lives. Betsy Bell was the object of the witch's attentions in 1835. She was determined to break up Betsy's marriage. It is told that the Bell witch would pull and jerk Betsy's hair so that she was unable to comb it.

John Bell, Jr. was said to have had many conferences with the spirit. The witch told him of events that had occurred thousands of year before. He was later found dead in bed, and the witch was said to have poisoned him. Neighbors found the body and testified that, when they reached the bedroom door, they heard a voice say, "I've got you now." Then they broke into the room and heard an outcry of laughter, but no one was there, and Mr. Bell was dead.

My mother can remember stories about the Bell witch which were told to her when she was little. One of the houses on the Bell farm was supposed to be the residence of the witch. Every night one could see the lights in the house go on and off; and if one went inside, chains could be heard being pulled up and down the stairs. There was also a covered bridge on the farm which no one liked to cross after dark because it was believed the witch was often there. She always prevented a certain member of the Bell family from crossing the bridge by holding onto the horse. No matter how much the horse was whipped, he wouldn't move an inch.

(For a full account of the Bell witch stories see A. P. Hudson and K. P. McCarter, "The Bell Witch of Tennessee and Mississippi," *Journal of American Folklore*, 47 (1934), pp. 45-63. All the incidents of this version are included in one or the other of the cycles analyzed by Hudson and McCarter. In most of the versions the spirit has more qualities of a ghost than of a witch. In the Mississippi cycle the spirit is the ghost of an overseer killed by John Bell, the planter.)

7. *The Disappearing Corpse*

Contributed by Barbara Sheller of N. Manchester, Indiana, November 26, 1945. She heard it from a friend.

It was a very cold and windy night; and Mr. Jones was on his way to Flint, Michigan, where he was going to visit some relatives. Ahead of him he noticed a car which had crashed into a big, sturdy elm tree. He stopped his car, got out, and proceeded to examine the wreckage. There was no one in the driver's seat. He looked around him, and several yards from the car he saw a woman lying cold and motionless. She was dead! He picked her up, put her in the back seat of his car, and drove to the nearest farmhouse. He carried the limp,

lifeless body of the woman to the porch and laid her on the porch swing. He knocked at the door, and after some moments a man and his wife appeared at the door. Mr. Jones told them about the wreck he had found and started to show them the dead woman lying on the swing when he saw that the body had disappeared. "It was here just a minute ago," he said very excitedly. The disappearance of the body alarmed him greatly, and he became quite upset. The farmer and his wife tried to calm Mr. Jones by telling him the legend known well in that part of the country. Every year since 1917 there has been a wreck on that same road, and each time the body of a dead woman had disappeared.

(I have found no parallel to this story. It does have something in common with the Vanishing Hitchhiker tradition. See William H. Jansen, "Folklore Items from a Teacher's Handbook," *HFB*, II (June, 1943, pp. 2-5.)

8A. *Balls of Fire*

Contributed by Babette Page of Pensacola, Florida, November 26, 1945. She heard it from her old colored nurse.

It all began on a night in the hottest part of the summer—the leaves were still, the air was calm, and the silence was almost unbearable. A full moon was high in the sky, and the stars were bright. A young Negro boy had been visiting his grandparents, who lived a mile or two from his own house, and had started on his way home down a path through the woods. When he didn't return home that night, his parents assumed that he had decided to spend the night with his grandparents and did not worry about him.

The next day it was apparent that something terrible had happened to the boy because no one had seen him or heard anything about him. That very same day another young boy was found unconscious along the path that the missing one had taken. When this boy was finally brought back to consciousness, he was so scared that he couldn't make a sound for a long time. As his voice gradually returned, the story came out.

He had been walking along and, hearing a queer flickering noise behind him, had turned and seen a huge ball of fire rolling along several feet away. The last thing he could remember was his trying to scream. This incident happened approximately two hours after the first boy had left his grandparents' house. He was never found, but on every full moon a huge ball of fire is seen rolling around in that vicinity by

someone who either doesn't know the legend or who is braver than most people.

8B. Balls of Fire

Contributed by Margaret Pruett of Huron, Indiana, November 26, 1945. She heard it from an old, retired schoolteacher who had been told the tale by her parents when she was a child.

Ninety years ago in Mitchell, Indiana, a family by the name of Tinsley lived in an old, dilapidated house. There were large cracks on the outside of the house, and these cracks had been stripped with narrow boards. Every time a member of the family became ill, there was a noise that sounded like someone running around the house with a stick held against the stripped siding. There could not have been anyone outside who was doing this because the place was thoroughly searched. Since the noise became rather nerve-racking, the Tinsleys moved out, and a family by the name of Powell moved in. In addition to hearing the stripping noise, the Powells also experienced a blue light that made its appearance in the home every evening. This light did not stay in one place, but moved back and forth among the different rooms in the home. If any member of the family awakened in the night, the light always appeared on the bedpost or on some nearby piece of furniture.

One evening the father and two sons of the family went hunting. As they started toward home after a wearisome night of chasing and trudging, they came to a fence. Before crossing the fence and continuing their journey, they sat down to rest a moment. As they sat there a ball of fire suddenly appeared in the form of a small tree and gradually shrank to the likeness of a tree trunk. The light changed from red to a pale, frosty blue; and in the center of this trunk appeared a human figure. Frightened at the weird sight and afraid to leave the spot, one of the boys shot at the figure. The apparition immediately vanished, and the three men started straight for home.

Upon their arrival home, they discovered that one of the girls in the family had become very ill. The father and one son solemnly put their guns in the corner of the room kept for the purpose; but as the second son proceeded to put away his gun, he caught his foot on the corner of an old rocker and, in trying to prevent a fall, grasped the gun in such a way that

12. *The Fatal Initiation*

B. Pseudo-Decapitation

Contributed by Gloria Pangborn of Indianapolis, Indiana, November 26, 1945. She heard it from her cousin, who was told the story when he was a freshman at Purdue by an active from the University of Michigan.

Out of all the pledges of a certain fraternity, Bill Thompson was the only one who really balked at taking orders from an upperclassman. The actives decided that the black marks that were stacking up against Bill would have to stop. The only way to accomplish this would be to discipline him harshly. They all agreed that they had been too easy on Bill. They would have to clamp down; and a good, stiff scare would do the trick.

"That old house just outside of town would be just the place," spoke up Tom. "Hey, we'll call it his Judgment Day and pass sentence on him," piped up someone else. One thing led to another, and pretty soon the boys were all laughing together over how Bill would be brought down to a pledge's size.

One cold night when the snow was falling softly, the actives blindfolded Bill and took him to the old house just outside of town. There he was solemnly tried and sentenced to death by decapitation. The blindfold was removed, and the terrified boy was led into a corner and placed on a block beside which stood a sharp axe.

The room was quiet. All the horror stories Bill could think of rushed through his mind. His knees began to shake. Opening his mouth, he tried desperately to scream; his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, but he could not utter a sound. His fingers gripped the block while a chill crept up and down his back. All he could think of was getting away. His feet were glued to the block. Bill was again blindfolded. Then he was given a sharp blow on the neck with a wet towel. When the actives lifted him up, he was dead.

(See *HFB*, IV (1945), pp. 49-55.)

IV. REGULAR FOLKTALES

12. *The Sheep Thief in the Graveyard*

Contributed by Gretchen Lynch of Bloomfield, Indiana, November 26, 1945. She heard the story from her roommate, who told it about a place in Galveston, Indiana.

One night two men were going to steal a sheep near a cemetery. One of them stayed in the cemetery, sitting on a tombstone, while the other went for the sheep. While the man was sitting on the tombstone, a passer-by saw him and thought him to be a ghost. Terribly frightened, he ran to the nearest store to tell about what he had seen.

Now in this store was a paralytic who disbelieved the man's story. The man, greatly angered, said, "I'll take you there!" He put the paralytic on his back and carried him to the cemetery. The thief, thinking his friend was returning with the sheep, asked, "Is he fat?" There was no answer. He repeated, "Is he fat?" The man was so frightened that he muttered, "I don't know, but you can have him anyway," and dumped the paralytic on the ground. In terror he raced back to the store. Upon arriving there he was amazed to see that the paralytic had beat him back.

(Type 1791, Aarne-Thompson, *Types of the Folktale* (Helsinki, 1928). For American texts and variants see *HFB*, I (1942), pp. 24-25; 55-57; 88.)

13. *Selling Soul to Devil*

Contributed by Gail Parr of Bloomington, Indiana, November 26, 1945.

A few miles outside of Boston, Massachusetts, where an old Indian fort remains, grows a group of ancient oak trees. According to the old stories, Captain Kidd once buried gold under one of these trees and left his treasure to the guardianship of the devil.

In the early seventeen hundreds a miserly man named Tom Walker lived near the oak grove, and with him lived his wife, who was equally miserly. They even tried to cheat each other, and had many bitter quarrels over things which should have been common property.

One day when Tom had been to Boston he took the short cut home through the swamp and grove of oaks. The place was dark, even at noon, and there were quagmires into which a person might fall. Tom sat down to rest on an old rotting tree trunk. As he was sitting there he heard a noise, and upon looking up saw a great black man with an axe standing before him. The man was neither an Indian nor a Negro, but his face appeared to be smudged by soot, and he had bristly black hair.

"Who are you?" asked Tom.

"I go by several names," said the man. "Some call me the wild huntsman, others call me Old Scratch, but here I'm known as the black woodsman."

The black woodsman then told Tom about Captain Kidd's buried treasure and said that he would give it to Tom on the condition that it be used as he stipulated. Tom, being a grasping fellow, could not resist the temptation. He opened a broker's office, loaned money at high interest rates, foreclosed mortgages, and drove people to bankruptcy. At such a business Tom was a genius. He pretended to be a friend to the people and then turned them away when they had no more money.

As Tom grew old he began to think about the good things he had gained from this life, and became anxious about the next. He began to plan ways to cheat the devil out of his half of the bargain they had made. He began to go to church and to read the Bible in all his spare moments.

One summer morning Tom was about to foreclose a mortgage which would mean the ruin of a man's life. The man begged for more time, but Tom refused even one more day.

The man said, "You have made so much money from me that you should be able to wait a little while."

Tom grew angry, forgot his piety, and said, "The devil take me if I've made a cent from you!"

At that moment there was a loud knock at the door. When Tom opened it, there stood the black woodsman leading a large black horse. He whisked Tom onto the horse's back, and the horse galloped off down the road in a cloud of dust.

A man living near the swamp said that he saw Tom and the horse speeding toward the grove of oaks, and then a bolt of lightning struck and set the trees on fire. When they started to settle Tom's estate they found in the vaults only ashes, and instead of his horses there were only skeletons. The next day Tom's house caught fire and burned to the ground.

This seems to be a combination of motif M 211. *Man sells soul to devil* and motif C 12.3 *Oath: "May the devil take me if . . ." Devil does.* Stith Thompson, *A Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Helsinki and Bloomington, 1932-37).

CLASSICAL VERSIONS OF "THE POISONED GARMENT"

By RAYMOND HIMELICK

Apropos the poisoned dress folktales in circulation today, it is interesting to note at least two classical versions known to ancient Greeks, as well as to even the most casual readers of Hellenic mythology. These early versions deal, of course, with Hercules and with Medea.

According to Bulfinch,¹ Hercules, rather late in his career, married Dejanira. When Nessus, an amorous Centaur, attempted to abduct his wife, Hercules promptly dispatched the ambitious rival with an arrow. The dying Nessus, however, had his revenge. He told Dejanira to take a portion of his blood and keep it as a charm to preserve the love of her husband. And Dejanira, apparently none too sure of her husband's fidelity or of her own attractions, complied with the request.

Sometime later Hercules in one of his exploits captured Iole, a comely maid with whom he subsequently struck up what Dejanira considered an overly warm friendship. When the hero sent to his wife for a new robe to wear while offering sacrifices to the gods in gratitude for his victory, Dejanira steeped the garment in the blood of Nessus. As soon as the robe became warm on Hercules' body, the poison penetrated, causing agony so intense that he is reported to have hurled Lichas, who had brought him the mantle, into the sea. When he attempted to tear the poisoned garment from his body, the flesh came with it and he hurriedly mounted his funeral pyre, where he perished.

In the second tale of this character, Medea, the sorceress whom Jason acquired along with the golden fleece, is supposed to have sent a poisoned robe to Creusa, a maid of Corinth, when her husband divorced her in favor of the latter. Creusa, eager to try on this addition to her trousseau, died in her new finery.²

It is interesting to note that in these classical versions the toxic properties of the clothing are in each case deliberately

¹ See Thomas Bulfinch, *The Age of Fable*, pp. 121-122.

² Thomas Bulfinch, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

incorporated by human agents, a faint gesture toward credibility, perhaps, which is lacking in some of the current tales.

(Thanks to Mr. Himelick for calling these passages to our attention. See also Motif D 1402.5 *Nessus shirt. Shirt burns wearer up*. For versions of the modern poisoned dress stories, see *HFB*, vol. 4 (March, 1945), p. 9; (June, 1945), pp. 32-34.—The Editor.)

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